



TEN PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE VOTING IN THE EU REFERENDUM AND BEYOND

Introduction

In 2015, in the run-up to the UK general election, Ekklesia developed, through conversation and dialogue, a set of ten core practical principles (values-in-use, not just abstract theory) which we offered as benchmarks for assessing the impact of different political claims, aims and policies. These can also be applied, we believe, to the choices embodied in the European Union and in what lies in the decision between remaining within it or leaving it.

These principles, expressed and developed in Christian terms, but also in ways intentionally open to those of other belief (religious or otherwise), are set out below.

We have provided the briefest summary of how we see the challenge from the Christian *message*, an interpretation or *meaning* that looks for a dynamic equivalent of that challenge in the present, and a short *memo* for EU referendum participants about some of the issues and questions we face in thinking about the role the British and Irish nations can play in Europe in the coming years. The 'memo' part should be seen as indicative (coming from the kind of perspective Ekklesia contributors and associates have been writing and analysing from), rather than prescriptive.

The ten core principles we advocate are:

(1) A commitment to favouring the poorest and most vulnerable

Message: In the biblical traditions of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, more is said about poverty and wealth than any other single topic. The concern is to lift up the downtrodden and challenge the misuse of power. In the company of Christ, outsiders become insiders.

Meaning: In the words of the late Anglican bishop, David Sheppard, there is within the Gospels a clear “bias to the poor”. This is something we want to see practiced in the life of faith communities. However, the “poorest and most vulnerable” are not to be thought of as objects, but subjects and protagonists.

Memo: Disability groups, the Poverty Truth Commission, Ekklesia and others have adopted the South African maxim, “Nothing about us without us is for us.” Its aim is that those living at the rough edge of policies should be actively engaged in creating their own solutions, rather than being ‘done to’ by politicians, policymakers and parliaments from on high. In the Euro debate the question we need to attend to is how the opportunities and dignity of all are being advocated and defended, but especially those without wealth and power. To use one practical example, Baroness Jane Campbell points out that the EU currently enacts a “double lock” on disability rights, which are otherwise being eroded very badly in the UK. She says, and may disabled people agree, that what is at risk in this referendum is “all the progress we have made on independent living, employment rights and access to information.”

(2) Actively redressing social and economic injustices and inequalities

Message: Overwhelmingly, along with responsible stewardship of resources, there is a biblical concern to redress injustice, support the weak, and in the words of the Magnificat, “bring down the mighty from their thrones.” The community around Jesus is an *ekklesia* of equals, a band of levellers. In this sense, though it has often been abandoned to power in history, Christianity is a revolutionary creed.

Meaning: As St Augustine once put it, “charity is no substitute for justice withheld”. By charity, he meant voluntary action rather than communal binding. But as public philosopher Martha Nussbaum says, “love matters for justice” because it is what binds us most deeply together. And as several political theologians have suggested, justice can be seen as an outworking of love in the political realm – that is, beyond the immediate reach of neighbourliness.

Memo: The richest one per cent has seen their share of global wealth increase from 44 per cent in 2009 to more than 50 per cent in 2016. There are huge inequalities between and within EU members, but also concerted attempts to create a market all can participate in, and to invest in programmes and policies that combat regional disparities and poverty. From Ekklesia’s perspective, a renewed coalition for just economy within and beyond the EU is clearly needed. That includes concerted pressure over TTIP, which can be blocked or reformed within the EU – and which will still apply to ex-members wanting market access for many years. Political economist Anne Pettifor, with whom Ekklesia has been pleased to collaborate, observes: “Europe’s [present] dominant economic model serves financial interests and markets, and forces divergence and disintegration on the union. But we, the people of Europe, yearn for peace, co-operation and convergence, based on human rights, economic and social justice and protection;

and democratic, accountable governments. I believe such a Europe is possible, and I want to fight for that.”

(3) Welcoming the stranger and valuing displaced and marginalised people

Message: In the Gospels Jesus welcomes those regarded as ‘unclean’, outsiders and strangers into his company, and faces criticism from the religious establishment for dining with them and including them. By so doing, he challenges all exclusionary religious and political systems.

Meaning: Refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers, people living with HIV/AIDS, disabled people, abused women, homeless people, LGBTIQ+ persons and ‘foreigners’ should not be seen as ‘them’, but as part of a changing and emerging ‘us’.

Memo: Migration – to focus on one defining concern – is forced on many people by poverty, war, human rights abuses, climate change and other impacts caused or aggravated by policies pursued by the rich world, historically and under the conditions of globalisation. It is these issues where the crisis talked about in the media as a ‘migration crisis’ centrally resides. The Leave campaign in the EU referendum debate has sought to make fear of migrants and hostility to immigration a central plank in their platform. Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, points out that economic and financial trauma in and beyond the Eurozone is not caused by migrants, but by greed, speculation and distorted economics. “We have a housing crisis; it was caused by the failure of markets, not by migrants. And our public services are stretched; that is caused by austerity politics, not by migrants”, he says. The attempt to shift blame on to ‘foreigners’ and ‘aliens’ is more reminiscent of the 1930s Europe we should be leaving as far behind as possible, rather than the 21st century one to which we need to aspire. It is disgraceful and wrong. But the insecurities that feed it need to be addressed.

(4) Seeing people, their dignity and rights as the solution not the problem

Message: In some ancient cultures only a king was regarded as being ‘in the image of God’. In the biblical tradition, all people, irrespective of tribe or caste, were designated the subjects of God’s creativity, love and care. Jesus broke taboos and codes that discriminated against women and others.

Meaning: Discrimination on the basis of gender, class, caste, ability, sexuality and ethnicity persists, leading to the exclusion or marginalization of large groups of people locally and globally.

Memo: Key proponents of the UK leaving the EU want to see the removal of human rights provisions enshrined in law in Britain by the will of parliament, the abolition of the Human Rights Act, and the ability to pick and choose which rights are available to whom and on what basis. Surveying the justice issues involved in

the EU debate, Michael Mansfield QC, along with other civil and human rights lawyers, argues that “remaining within the European Union is the only way in which the common and fundamental standards of social and economic justice can be agreed and implemented for the good of all.” As an example, it is worth noting that the EU has been positive for maternity and paternity leave for parents, workplace rights during pregnancy, and rules protecting against harassment and unequal treatment. Such rules help halt a race to the bottom by companies trying to find the least protected workforce where workers enjoy the fewest rights.

(5) Moving from punitive ‘welfare’ to a society where all can genuinely fare well

Message: The biblical vision of *shalom/salaam* is one of restored relationships. The Jubilee tradition frees slaves and restores land. Early Christian communities saw the sharing of goods and the welfare of all as a basic component of their identity and commitment to the way of Christ.

Meaning: There is a ‘common good’ to which we can and should aspire which challenges the segregation and inequality that breeds poor health, poverty and anomie.

Memo: Those on low incomes, the jobless, homeless people, women (disproportionately), disabled people and the sick are among those being made to pay the price of austerity, while the wealthy are bailed out. As economic commentator Paul Mason observes: “In Britain, it is common ... to argue ‘austerity is a political choice’. But, in the Eurozone, it is mandated by the Lisbon Treaty, and by the stability and growth pact rules that penalise countries if they run deficits and debts in excess of EU targets.” The UK is in the EU at present, but outside the Eurozone. These rules can only be changed from within. That requires the mobilisation of both civic and parliamentary opposition and a long-term goal of economic change based on social, regional and environmental priorities.

(6) Promoting community and neighbourhood empowerment

Message: The Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament describes the strengthening of communities of hope and resistance living in the shadow of Empire, from which the energy of the Christian message flowed.

Meaning: The empowerment of people – economically, socially, culturally, politically and spiritually – is a source of social and personal transformation which turns them into agents rather than mere recipients.

Memo: There is much talk of devolution and local control in the political arena at present, both within and without the EU. The reality is often different, though. Britain, accession states and others have benefitted from EU regional fund

support. That is good, but not sufficient. Equalisation and empowerment from the ground up needs to be a central goal. Within the EU one balance that needs to be achieved is between the principle of subsidiarity and the possibilities of federal collaboration. A confederal pattern seems to be the way forward in this context, both in Europe and in the British and Irish isles.

(7) Food, education, health, housing, work and sustainable income for all

Message: the Apostle Paul promoted a message of sharing among early Christian communities, so that there was neither want nor excess among them. Archbishop William Temple and others saw in this the grounds for creating a participatory, welfare-based society.

Meaning: In this vision there is a desire to ensure that we each have the freedom to develop to our full potential. This requires communities with the necessary securities and opportunities to enable and benefit from that development.

Memo: Food poverty and hunger, lack of affordable housing, educational and health inequalities, low wages and job insecurities persist (and in some cases grow) in a country considered to be the fourth wealthiest on the planet, and in other parts of Europe. Human flourishing needs to be at the heart of political economy from this perspective. The EU has been a bulwark of labour rights, the working time directive, rights for minorities, and social integration. A social Europe and serious consideration of a basic income arrangement across the EU is a highly desirable goal, together with economic arrangements that support such outcomes.

(8) Care for planet and people as the basis for human development

Message: The “eco” in ecology comes from the New Testament Greek word *oikos* for “house” and is part of the etymological roots of the word “economy” (*oikonomia*) meaning household purse. The interrelation between the earth, its people and the right use of resources is firmly established in the biblical vision of creation restored.

Meaning: In modern terms, eco-justice “challenges both humanity’s destruction of the earth and the abuse of economic and political power which result in poor people having to suffer the effects of environmental damage,” points out the World Council of Churches.

Memo: Further action to end carbon dependency and move towards a sustainable, eco-economy is vital to the future of people and planet today. The environment is our common heritage, and an important element of the cooperative work that can be achieved through the EU is effective action to combat anthropogenic global warming and face up to the challenge of climate change. Danish-born London environmentalist Anders Lorenzen points out: “In the UK it is the EU’s leadership that has prompted strong climate change policies.

These policies include the legally binding climate change act, the carbon price floor and strong renewable energy targets; and not least, a rapid move away from coal. And around issues such as air pollution, it is the EU that challenges the UK government when they don't do enough. Without the EU there would be no one to hold the UK government to account on this important health and environment issue."

(9) Investing in nonviolent alternatives to war and force as the basis for security

Message: It is peacemakers not war-prosecutors who are blessed in the Beatitudes. The last injunction Jesus left to his companions before his execution, according to St John's Gospel, was "put away your swords". In his crucifixion by the powers that be, Jesus absorbs violence having refused to inflict it.

Meaning: War and violence are not "solutions", but tragedies. The world is being torn apart by cycles of violence, a clash of barbarisms, drone diplomacy, an arms dependent economy and what theologian Walter Wink called 'the myth of redemptive violence'.

Memo: One issue that needs to be highlighted and tackled across Europe is how we propose to re-invest in peace forces and non-lethal ways of handling conflict in the C21st. The EU is part of a European project that has had, as a central aim, the maintenance of peace across the continent. This has been largely absent from the debate in the UK, but remains vitally important. European partners and civic favouring an end to WMDs and militarisation need to work together concertedly to ensure that is the trajectory for our continent in the coming years.

(10) Transparency, honesty and accountability in public and economic life

Message: "The truth shall set you free" was the promise of Christ according to St John's Gospel. But those who preferred a lie that put them in power, rather than a truth that might have divested them of it, continued to collude against him.

Meaning: Economic and political corruption and lack of accountability on a massive scale is widespread not just in parts of the so-called developing world, but among the wealthiest nations, and among the beneficiaries of the credit and austerity crisis.

Memo: Tax evasion, MPs' expenses scandals, lack of transparency in the City, the RBS scandal and phone hacking are all signs of an unhealthy body politic and economic. That is the reality in the UK. Tax justice campaigner and academic Professor Richard Murphy, with whom Ekklesia is pleased to cooperate, says: "The EU has done more to really tackle international tax abuse than any other organisation: do we really want to give up the chance to be involved in that? Acknowledging the huge problems that need tackling within the EU, he adds: "The [European] parliament has been way ahead of the game in demanding reform to hold big business to account for its tax abuse. Why give that up? No

organisation in the world has done more to crack open tax haven secrecy than the EU. That's a lot to lose." The large-scale democratisation agenda articulated and championed by the Another Europe is Possible movement, Diem25, OpenDemocracy and others is another vital imperative for the future of the EU and global citizenship.

Concluding comments and an invitation

Not all who adhere to, and seek to apply, these principles within the debate about the UK and the European Union will reach the same decision about how to vote in the EU referendum on 23 June 2016, which is a straightforward 'in' versus 'out' polarity.

The conclusion the great majority of Ekklesia's associates, friends and allies seem to have made is that, while there are large problems that need tackling within the EU, the UK leaving it at this point would substantially weaken the kind of social, labour and environmental protections that embody many of our deepest concerns for people and planet; that the spirit of inward looking, ethnicised nationalism and xenophobia at the heart of the Leave campaign is both disturbing and highly dangerous; that the struggle for alternatives to neoliberalism needs to be conducted within as well as outwith EU institutions; that working class people who have been excluded and abused by the dominant political order are being further deceived by those positing Brexit as a blow against unaccountable elites; that upholding freedom of movement and dignity for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is of fundamental importance to our shared humanity; and that the resurgence of the far right across Europe would be fed rather than abated by Brexit. The reader is free to agree or disagree with those conclusions, but we would ask all voters in this referendum – especially people of faith and hope – to think long and hard about the consequences of our choice for our neighbours seen and unseen, and especially for most vulnerable and for the earth we share, not just for ourselves and our short-term interests.

On the matter of whether the EU is a 'religious issue': clearly Christians and ethical humanists, along with people from the Jewish, Muslim and other faiths, have played an important role in making Europe what it is today – a zone of openness and plurality. That can be recognised and honoured without starting to get competitive about who did what.

Some have suggested that religion is not featuring enough in terms of looking at affiliations and voting patterns, and what to see the EU debate defined in religious terms alongside political, economic, social and cultural ones. Ekklesia would want to question the entire way of thinking that sees 'religion' in terms of particular interests abstracted from the fate and condition of human beings and human communities in particular times and places.

At the heart of the Christian story is God coming to us in and through our humanity, not part of us that can be labelled our 'religiosity'. Indeed, it was distorted religiosity as much as distorted power politics that led to the killing of

Jesus. The church founded on the Christ who was crucified and restored to life by the power of God's love is not intended to be a 'religious institution' claiming privilege over and against others. Rather, its calling is to model a form of human community that is open to all, offers hope to all, seeks the welfare of all, and recognises its dependence upon the life-giving of God and upon mutual concern for neighbour. Its job is to put into practice a form of life that embodies and promotes those convictions, based on economic sharing, forgiveness, costly love, peacemaking and patient commitment to personal and social transformation.

By that understanding, we resist the idea that 'religion' can be imposed on nations or states, or that people should be asked to participate as citizens on the basis of furthering their own religiously defended communal interests. The Christian calling is to act for our neighbours, to honour the gift of life, to care for the earth as God's good gift, and to assign particular priority to the needs of those who are damaged, wounded, brutalized, ignored, impoverished and excluded in this world. That is the fruit of true spirituality, not the creation of a separate zone of life known as 'religion' that exists in competition with other groups and interests.

Our hope, therefore, is that people of hope (Christians, those of other faiths, and people of non-religious ethical commitment) will vote in a positive and open-hearted way in this EU referendum. In particular, Ekklesia's commitment and invitation is to reject the politics of fear, hatred, greed and xenophobia in all its forms. Or to put that in the form of a question: "how can we love our neighbours as ourselves in the decision we have to make, and in the way we make it?"

AUTHORSHIP

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*The **Ten Values** were jointly created with Ekklesia staff and associates in 2014/15. The commentary here is by the author.*

FURTHER READING

- *What kind of European future?* (Ekklesia, 13 June 2016) – <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/23160>
- *Assessing Christian contributions to the EU referendum debate* (Ekklesia, 21 June 2016) – <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/23188>
- *General Election 2015 focus: 'Vote for what you believe in'* (Ekklesia, 5 March 2015) – <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21487>
- *Ekklesia's EU referendum briefing and commentary:* <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/eureferendum>

ABOUT EKKLESIA

Founded in 2002, Ekklesia is a public policy think-tank that explores the changing nature of the relationship between politics and beliefs in a plural world. Committed to social justice, peacemaking, environmental sustainability and new economy, it seeks to combine transformative Christian thinking about public life with ideas and insights from a range of allies beyond the Christian tradition.

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